DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 166 291 UD 018 995

AUTHOR Queen, Renee
TITLE Family Communications With Schools and the Community.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 15p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Development; *Communication Problems; Elementary Secondary Education; *Family School Relationship; *Parent Participation; *Parent Role; *School Community Relationship; School Role; Socialization; Student Adjustment; Television

ABSTRACT

The family, responsible for the well being of children, has felt alienated from the schools. One of the reasons has been its inability to communicate personal and social needs to the schools, and the schools' inability to clarify what is expected from parents. Parents and the family unit need to be helped to understand the schools' role in the life of the child. There are several factors affecting this communication process within the family, between the family and the school, and the family and the community: (1) the response of parents to children as students; (2) the role of the teacher; (3) the inclusionary/ exclusionary practices of the school; (4) the role of television. As families learn to cope with these factors, communication will be enriched and alienation and negative attitudes will be mitigated. (Author/WI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED166291

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Renee Queen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Family Communications

With

Schools and the Community

Renee Queen, Ed. D.

New York State Education Department

1978

UD018995

FAMILY COMMUNICATIONS
WITH
SCHOOLS AND THE COMMUNITY

The problems confronted, avoided, or shared in families are in direct relationship to the Maslow hierarchy of needs. When socio-economic problems exist-needs that are subsumed under life sustaining systems-food-shelter-clothing, become the penumbra in the oppressiveness of problems. There is neither space for nurturant needs-love-security-acceptance-sense of self nor for educational or cultural needs.

In order to cope with problems, to determine solutions, it is vital to savor the words in the title. The one that is neon bright is communications-a visionary, value laden, sombre, awesome word. The messages that inhere in the concept of communications vary with the users emotional and idiosyncratic lexicon. In a word association game, response would include:

communication	-	two way
communication	-	sending messages
communiation	-	words
communication	-	impossible!

It is fulcrum for the other words in the title and its overtones and pervasiveness need to be recognized before exploring the permutations and definitions of Family-Communications-School-Community.

The family, in the context of parenting, is the collection of individiuals responsible for the well-being of the children-and for each other. Their caring for and reaching out to each other starts with reaching in to understand self needs. This moves on to include self-other concerns which result in contact with the school and community. In the climate of caring and community, to provision affective and effective environments for children, members of the family provide the bridge from home to school and the link with school and community for the young people. Forces impinge upon the family from the other direction

as well, for the family is an open-ended system subject to disequilibrium from a variety of sources-the school-the community, (work and social activities), with each family responding to the forces in idiosyncratic and similar ways. This disequilibrium is part of the family's growth, with children presenting one of the richest challenges to developing new patterns and resources.

Communications include the language, behaviors, and processes used in reaching out to each other and to the resources and institutions in the social system. For the family and teachers of young children in their crucial, formative stages, the influence of language is the support structure in learning to communicate. Through language children discover their own individuality;they learn to savor and share experiences through communication with others. Small children who tell parents what has happened to them at school are learning to trust, to share or to be stifled and withdrawn through responses of the listener. A rich language surround in home/school provides a basis for on-goingness-on-growingness in the ever-widening world of experiences. "Language reflects the total life of a community in which a child is reared...The young human could not grow as a person without identifying himself (herself) with the immediate community." (Jones and Mulford, p. 42) This awareness underscoresthe inclusion of the word community in constructing the roles of the parents.

Communications start in the home with the child; the child is the agenda in the communication nexus for family and school. Family communications are essential in helping the school understand and cope with the needs of the family, and in helping the family understand the role and the demands of the school.

The definition of the school grows out of the myriad hopes, expectations, and frustrations of the society. It is the system, often the behemoth charged with developing learning skills and providing a

diversified educational curriculum, in tune with the child's mental, psychological, and social readiness and needs. It is defined as one of the strongest influences in the rearing of the child. In the context of the title, family communications with the school eases children through one of the vital passages in their lives. White in "Raising Children in Modern America" edited by Talbot, stresses the need for harmony between family and school:

> ...Once the child enters school, his family will follow his progress and negotiate with him and the school to optimize it.
>
> ...for any child today, a mismatch between his family and his school is regarded as serious business by all parties. (Talbot, p. 143)

The network of communications between family and school is predicated on understanding what the family should expect from the school-the education process. A component of schooling is the classroom climate, as shaped and defined by the role of the teacher. Parents are aware that teachers exert a force that often remains with children the rest of their lives. Children spend more of their waking hours in school than in the home-or in the company of members of the family. Even with this awareness parents are often timid with the child's teacher, hesitant to communicate information that would help the school understand the child-hesitant to complain or communicate with the hierarchy of power about ineffective or harmful teachers, administrators, lacklustre curricula, pablum school experiences. They are often reluctant to undermine the influence of any teacher for fear of negating the school learning experiences. This attitude communicates to the child that his/her information about the teacher is not believed thus giving children little credit for common sense, judgment and perception.

Parents need to be active participants in the school life of their children. This includes knowing how to listen to the child, attentive to the subliminal messages that children transmit about school experiences through their physical and psychological behavior. It is the parent's responsibility to communicate these insights to the teacher. Early identification of problem areas can circumvent later school phobias or learning dysfunction. Discussions with teachers often reveal strengths as well, and alert school and home to ways they can support each other in moving the child along the growth continuum into the ever-widening child-world.

Parents need to arrange conferences with teachers if teachers do not do so. Parent groups can schedule panel discussions with teachers on topics that touch the lives of children.

Very often parents can provide leadership in selecting topics, resource people and materials from their work worlds.

This includes the community, the last word in the title. The community is a snail of concentric circles: The child is the hub. The child moves from self experiences to include family, contacts in the peer group, neighborhood, class, school and the community. The community is a metaphor for the world in which the children can become fully-functioning adults as they, inturn, receive support from its institutions.

The surrounding community, as children move out from home and school, provides the time, place, example, and encouragement for others to become involved with children. These encounters occur in stores, museums, parks, libraries, the street corner, the churches and recreational centers-places where all ages can interact. Family communications with the community grow out of an understanding of what role each system plays in the life of the child. The family functioning as

a change agent, evolves through insights into the interrelatedness of Families-Community-School.

Because of this synergistic relationship, ways of communicating and the essence of communications with school and community will be intertwined. What is communicated is predicated upon the indications that "...the value systems and ways of thinking and acting represented to children by parents and other meaningful people can exert a powerful influence upon them." (Talbot, N.p. 50) This has to be placed in the context of school and community, for the antipodes of human behavior - nurturant - responsible behavior and egoistic - dependent - dominant behavior are cultivated or suppressed along a continuum in varied cultural groups. With this in mind families need to communicate ethnicity/culture to the school starting with entry into day care. A child's behavior is easily misinterpreted by a teacher denied the armature of cultural or familial antecedents. Families transmit value systems, behavioral preferences to their children in a multitude of ways. Teachers need to be made aware of these modes and systems so that maladaptive behavior can be separated from cultural patterning and suitable approaches planned.

In some families the stress of survival has resulted in parental alienation. The schools, receiving this communication in overt and covert ways, must then assume more of the responsibility as a socializing agent. The schools, when sensing or observing family problems, need to communicate with parents, encourage their participation in the educative process, gently support them in their understanding of adult roles in children's lives.

Rather than blame placing:

> "Children can't learn because the home is not supportive!
>
> "Children can't learn because the teacher can't teach!"

each force has to impinge in positive ways upon the other, mindful of a shared goal-the happy, healthy, achieving child.

Affirmative action would include parents in the pulse of the school. Parents, apprised of the rights of children would set up benchmark criteria for the teaching/schooling climate.

One route to affirmative action is family participation in school board meetings. In the decade of the 70's, parent groups have become more vocal in their demands for excellence in education, from day-care to federal-state-city legislation and funding to support it! Certainly there are parents and community factions who have politicized education and placed self-goals above child welfare. Family awareness of process is efficacious in obviating some of this behavior.

Before families can verbalize needs to the school they need to be clear about realistic expectations.

Talbot encapsultates what families should expect from the school.

> "In addition to these areas of knowledge and skill, training programs for child development staff members should cultivate sensitivity to children's feelings, readiness to listen and to adapt adult language as necessary to communicate with children the ability to protect orderliness without sacrificing childish spontaneity and the capacity to maintain control without being threatening, to be emotionally responsive and take pleasure in children's successes while also being ready to be supportive when they have troubles or failures, to encourage imaginativeness and to bring humor into the group and to feel committed to maximizing the strengths and potentials of each child in relation both to himself and his family." (Talbot, p. 43)

Families, as participants in school board meetings, as volunteers in schools, as paraprofessionals, as Johnny's Mother, Susan's father, can exert an influence in effecting change. The communications process may start with mini task forces to identify problems and establish procedures. The first success is sufficient to motivate greater involvement. Families need to be involved in many educational areas: committees to plan curriculum;workshops with school personnel on the child's cognitive development; concern with teacher behavior and materials that meet the child's psycho-social and affective needs. Families alerted to health, welfare and safety regulations, as well as human rights,can communicate with those in charge to secure laws, standards, and regulations for the protection of the child from physical, psychological,and social problems that can spell disaster for them. Corrective and supportive actions are indicated-to treat the causative factors rather than the resultant disease. Families, therefore should stress the need for measures to screen children for physical, intellectual, behavioral, and emotional problems. "Child-Find," a program for identifying children with handicapping conditions and placing them in suitable educational settings, is indicative of what can be accomplished.

Early identification helps the school serve the child and the family understand the problem. The gain: a member of society who will not turn to anti-social acts out of frustration or dysfunction.

In a society where children enter school at ever younger age and remain often until adulthood, it is imperative to understand the school's role in the life of the child and the family, since it ultimately affects the child as a member of the community.

In the early years of the school system the multi-ethnic nature of the society contributed to its insularity since families looked to the schools as a magical springboard to economic improvement. Too beset with their own problems, unsure of the educational process, they unwittingly contributed to the segregation of the school from the rest of society. Families must communicate the need to have school life integrated into the community. The school should reflect the community as families communicate their values, attitudes and ethnicity. As resource people, they can help to plan festivals, share cooking experiences based on ethnic foods, and participate in ways that teachers and parents work out together.

When the school is placed on the continuumof life forces, there will be a more sanguine relationship between school and community, with libraries, museums, cultural and human services integrated with the life of the school. Parents need to be aware of programs and services available in the community and plan the time to introduce the child to them. The early initiation will help turn children into life long learners-curious and able to seek out responses to their curiosity.

A force that insinuates itself in the family, school, and community and affects the child's social development, aggressive response/passivity, and learning style is Television. Television - a source of communication and a process that <u>needs</u> family communications has been heralded as a panacea for preparing children for school learning through Sesame Street, Zoom, Mister Rogers and Captain Kangaroo, to name a few. It has been blasphemed as a mythical siren holding viewers in a passive, trance-like state. It has been criticized for its sales pitch to vulnerable viewers, ready to purchase every toy and food tantalyzingly presented to them.

Studies by Bandura (Bronfenbrenner, p. 110) indicate that anti-societal values, alienation as a behavioral style and expectations of teaching as a variety show have conspired to turn television into an oxymoronic force.

Plato posed a question relevant to television today:

> ...And shall we just carelessly allow children to hear any casual tales which may be devised by casual persons, and to receive in their minds ideas for the most part the very opposite of those which we should wish them to have when they are grown up? (Bronfenbrenner, p. 103)

The family response suggested by Marie Winn in her book, "The Plug In Drug" to counteract the malevolent effects of television, is to remove the set from the life of the child. This, however, is simplistic and confronts what is rather then focusing on what is possible.

"Action for Children's Television" pioneered parent power in bringing about effective changes in programming and advertising practices. It is a highly successful group and illustrates that "... a group of citizens can exert a powerful influence on matters pertaining to child well-being by directing well-organized efforts at the right places." (Talbot, p. 83).

Families need to communicate their attitudes towards television to the school and community to encourage proprioceptive involvement of the viewer with carefully selected programs, and follow-up activities. Family communications with school and community must include, therefore, a reevaluation of the use of television in the home and school and plans for lobbying for changes in programming and other vital aspects.

In considering the concentric circles of involement, families need to play a more active role in the community-assessing the children's needs, the family's needs and communicating with the school and community hierarchy to meet these needs. Parents can communicate the need for day

care centers in neighborhoods where families live and in places where parent work. They can redesign playgrounds, develop volunteer programs, encourage the use of schools as neighborhood centers where all members of the community could share time and communications usually deprived of them in the nuclear family structure.

In viewing the role of the community as a source of service to the child and family it is essential to add another dimension-what the child can do for the community to increase the sense and level of responsibility.

Bronfenbrenner (p. 163) points out:

> ...Learning early in life the skills and rewards of service to one's community brings with it the benefit of a more stable and gratifying self-identity.

This in turn supports the child's school adjustment. Children, who see their families actively involved in the life of the community, will find role models that will reduce their feelings of alienation, indifference, and antagonism that grow out of the inability to communicate and articulate behavior.

Bronfenbrenner (p.166) encapsulates a concern for a network of caring and communication to effect societal change:

> ... What is called for is greater involvement of parents and other adults in the lives of children, and--conversely -- greater involvement of children in responsibility on behalf of their own family, community and society at large.

In reassessing the integration of the concepts of family, school, and community the goals of child rearing need to be addressed. If caring, responsiveness, on-growing development, and involvement are penultimate goals then provisioning for these traits in those who touch the lives of children will help move them along this path. The goals are utopianly overwhelming, but if viewed in small segments, in symposiums and workshops, it is easier to plan constructive approaches,

to encourage the family in its communications role.

It requires imagination, intelligence, and determination to bring about changes in people as individuals and as members of a family reaching out to and taking in the school and the community. The results-moving away from alienation and fragmentation in American life-toward neighborliness, civic concern and devotion to the young warrant the process.

Next to each word write your first reaction to the word. In the next column briefly define the word from your own frame of reference.

In the third column note what you consider pervasive problems for you in the context of the word.

	Reaction	Definition	Problems
Family			
Communications			
School			
Community			

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. BRODEY, Warren - Changing the Family. New York: Clarkson Potter, 1968

2. BRONFENBRENNER, Urie - Two Worlds of Childhood. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970

3. FREMON, Suzanne - Children And Their Parents. Toward Maturity. New York: Harper and Row, 1968.

4. JONES, Anthony, Mulford, Jeremy - Children Using Language. London: Oxford University Press, 1971.

5. TALBOT, Nathan - Raising Children in Modern America: What Parents and Societies Should Be Doing For Their Children. Boston: Little Brown, 1976.

6. TALBOT, Nathan - ed. Raising Children in Modern America: Problems and Perspective Solutions. Boston: Little Brown, 1976.